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CALENDAR

POP MUSIC

FACES: BACK TO ESSENCE FOR SANTANA

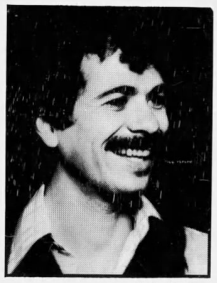
BY DENNIS HUNT

Spiritualism swept into Carlos Santana's music early in the early '70s and pried him out of conventional and commercial musical patterns. The guitarist-singer abandoned the Latin-based rock that had made him one of the nation's most popular artists.

To better express his spiritualistic fervor he plunged into esoteric rock-jazz. A few years later, as abruptly as it had appeared, that spiritualism vanished from Santana's music, which became thoroughly commercial again and has been that way ever since.

Santana fans who prefer his pop sound had better gorge themselves on it while they can. Rock reigns on his new Columbia album, "Marathon," and his Friday night concert at the Long Beach Terrace Theater mostly will be rock-oriented, too. But on his next album and tour, he promises the music will be drastically different.

He traced this decision back to something that happened during his recent tour of Japan. One of the stops was Hiroshima, where the first atom bomb was dropped. "I couldn't sleep there," Santana explained by phone from his home in San Francisco. "There's something in the air there that demands you to go deeper inside yourself. I started thinking a lot about the music I'm doing and I came to the conclusion I should be doing something much more challenging and compelling, something people will either really love or really hate, something that comes from way down deep inside me."



Carlos Santana

Though able to isolate the album's spiritualistic origins, Santana could give none of the musical details. "I can only say it will be different," he predicted, "drastically different from what we're doing now. Everybody wants to sell albums. I've done that for a while and focused on the pop thing. Now I want to express an inner thing. I'm going to play what I want to play without compromises. I feel compelled to do that again and I won't rest until I do it."

Santana didn't really criticize his last two albums, "Inner Secrets" and "Marathon," but a general dissatisfaction with them, undoubtedly due to their unabashed commercialism, was quite evident. "Inner Secrets" was produced by pop experts Dennis Lambert and Brian Potter. In their zeal to achieve a polished sound, Santana charged, spontaneity was sacrificed.

"Something was missing," he observed. "It was all too calculated, a real good studio job but not spontaneous. It's like the Eagles. They know how to record and they're great in the studio. They know how to get an incredible sound out of their instruments. But their albums have no spontaneity. They're too calculated, too slick. That's what happened on 'Inner Secrets.' That doesn't make it a bad album; it's just not spontaneous. I didn't want that to happen again."

The first step, of course, was to hire a new producer. "Marathon" was produced by Keith Olsen, who has worked with Fleetwood Mac, Foreigner and the Grateful Dead. A standard rock album, its lone surprise is its dogged traditionalism. There are few surprises in the music itself.

According to Santana, there was no real plan, at first, to make a rock album. "We just got together and played," he recalled. "This is the direction it took." In retrospect, though, hiring Olsen was certainly a step in the rock direction.

Now Santana is already beyond "Marathon." To him, commercialism has become synonymous with safety and a sort of musical apathy. There have been stylistic shifts in the last few albums but they've been routinely accomplished within commercial pop boundaries. Now he guiltily feels he's been cruising in pop for too long.

Santana is craving what he calls adversity: "By that I mean going out on a limb and feeling pressure. Anytime you go for something different, something that's not necessarily commercial, a lot of people are going to hate it. That's threatening and that creates pressure. Under pressure you can do great work. That pressure, that kind of adversity brings out the best in people."

To some degree Santana has been spurred to more radical musical exploration by Bob Dylan's latest album, the staunchly spiritual "Slow Train Coming," a new direction for him.

"Bob is pinching people," Santana pointed out with great admiration. "He's saying, 'Hey America, wake up.' What Bob's doing now is uncompromising and I respect him for that. He's doing what his heart tells him. That's what I'm going to do."

Spiritualism ceased being a guiding force in Santana's music with his 1976 album, "Amigos." Why did he then return to the earthy Latin-rock he had abandoned in 1972?

"I had to accept that I grew up with the music of people like Chuck Berry and B. B. King," he replied. "I just missed that music after a while and I had a tremendous yearning to play it again. Now I've done it for a while and so I'm ready for something more challenging again."

When promoter Bill Graham gave the Santana band its big break about 12 years ago, spiritualism, to be sure, wasn't a factor in Santana's life. For years, he acknowledged, he was a drug addict and reveled in that tempestuous, macho rock-star life style. Through musicians Larry Coryell and John McLaughlin he was inspired to embrace the teaching of guru Sri Chinmoy. Spiritualism has dominated his life ever since.

From poet-mystic Kahlil Gibran, Santana culled an idea that summarized his forthcoming musical upheaval: "Gibran said when someone starts unfolding from within, reaching deep inside himself, then he sees things differently and some will call him a madman. So there's that madman inside you that can make you different, can make you move mountains. When you lose touch with it you become mediocre and ordinary like everybody else. Now I'm really in touch with that thing inside me. People can call me madman. I won't mind." □

POPLINE: PEEKING AT ROCK MENUS

BY PATRICK GOLDSTEIN

Despite the rash of belt-tightening measures in the record industry, it's reassuring to note that rock's top stars have been spared the worst indignities of these stringent economic moves. According to next month's Oui magazine, rock promoters must still provide a sumptuous array of food and refreshments for bands traveling the concert circuit.

These culinary demands—spelled out in elaborate contractual "riders"—can be both bizarre and expensive. At the last California Jam, for example, promoters spent more than $40,000 on eats and drinks—just for the bands.

Most rock menus fit the group's image perfectly. The Who, according to one promoter, prefer "anything you can throw at them." Aerosmith's contract specifies brown towels, 2 pounds of black jelly beans and M&Ms, but no yellow ones. Eddie Money insists on "baseball" food, most notably beer and New York-style hot dogs with sauerkraut.

Asked what the band consumes backstage, one member of Kiss replied, "Blondes, brunettes, redheads, Perrier water optional. But we must have 24-karat gold knives and forks."

Apparently most promoters are glad to keep the stars fat and happy. Weary from filling orders for exotic mineral waters and rare vegetarian delicacies, one promoter quipped, "Whatever they ask for, we accept as normal.

"It's as if you had a naked girl in your office all the time. You'd notice her the first couple of days. But after that you'd just get used to her."

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ROCK JOCK SOCKED: Are the Angry Samoans, one of L.A.'s most outrageous local bands, being blacklisted by several local clubs because of the group's vitriolic anti-Rodney Bingenheimer campaign? The group claims that a recent date at the Hong Kong Cafe was canceled after the band's bassist, appearing on Richard Meltzer's late night KPFK radio show, lambasted Bingenheimer, saying, "We want to kill him."

The group regularly performs "Get Off the Air," an anti-Rodney anthem that describes the L.A. new-wave scene kingmaker as a "pathetic male groupie." Bingenheimer, who claimed that he once regularly played the group's songs on his Sunday night KROQ program, confirmed that he is actively discouraging clubs that advertise on his show from booking the band. "I'm not gonna plug any clubs that book the Samoans," he said. "These threats sound serious to me."

Metal Mike Saunders, the Samoans guitarist, said he was "flattered" to be the victim of a Bingenheimer blacklist, adding that "this could be the greatest thing that's ever happened to us."

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MOVE OVER, MR. COFFEE: Elvis Presley, legend has it, never drank alcohol—his mother forbade it—but that won't stop Factors Inc. and the Frontenac Wine Co. from marketing a new semisweet white wine with his face on the label, which will read "Always Elvis—Blanc D'Oro." Apprised of the late singer's teetotaler status, a spokesman for the firms explained, "We feel this is the kind of wine Elvis would have drunk if he did drink."

The bottle, which will sell for $5 apiece, also will display an inspirational message about Elvis by longtime manager Col. Tom Parker. Don't expect to see the Colonel's favorite dictum, which counseled, "You don't have to be nice to people on your way up if you're not coming back down."

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TAPE REPLAY: Faced with mounting record company animosity over the home taping of hit albums, the RKO radio chain (which includes local stations KHJ and KRTH) has banned the playing of albums in their entirety. In an open letter to the music community, RKO national music coordinator Dave Sholin said, "While we have never encouraged listeners to tape albums, we feel the only way to prevent this is by eliminating this program element."

The album piracy controversy has another added twist. While record companies charge that a growing number of listeners are taping records off the radio, many top rock artists, led by Stevie Wonder, the Bee Gees, Blondie and the Atlanta Rhythm Section, have endorsed blank tape products through print and TV commercials. And at least two major record labels, CBS and Capitol Records, manufacture raw tape for blank cassette products.

A speedy end to the tape wars is doubtful, but Asylum chief Joe Smith has offered a novel solution to the home taping epidemic. With his tongue firmly in cheek, Smith said what's needed is a tone on a record that will "blow up your house if you tape off the air."

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CHAIRMAN OF THE BORED: Iggy Pop has rounded up an all-star band for his new tour, which comes to L.A. Nov. 30 at the Stardust Ballroom. Iggy's new stage-mates include guitarist Ivan Kral (on loan from the Patti Smith Group), ex-Damned guitarist Brian James, original Sex Pistols bassist Glen Matlock and former Rich Kids drummer Klaus Kruger.

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DISC 'N' DAT: This week's releases include "The Other One" by Bob Welch, "Down on the Farm" by Little Feat, and "Broken English" by Marianne Faithful, a long-awaited new record produced by Stevie Winwood. □

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